

# **Tips for Writing a Strong AmeriCorps Grant Application**

## **General Aspects of a Strong AmeriCorps Application:**

### **Need:**

- The application demonstrates a compelling need in the community and describes a service that would otherwise not be provided.
- The program serves an area or population not previously served by AmeriCorps.
- The needs are founded on research, and meeting these needs is valuable to the community.

### **Collaborations/Partnerships:**

- The applicant can demonstrate strong collaborations and/or partners, private and public, community-based and faith-based.
- The collaborators/partners support the program beyond a letter of support (e.g. they provide match, training, supervision, etc.)
- The application shows other community support from elected officials, government agencies, etc.

### **Performance:**

- The application provides qualitative and quantitative data from prior years.
- The program design includes measurable outcomes that are clearly linked to the need.

### **Volunteer Mobilization:**

- The applicant is able to show the ability to leverage volunteers.
- The program design includes a clear plan for volunteer recruitment and management as well as a strong volunteer generation performance measure.

### **Member Support:**

- The program design includes a good plan for recruiting members.
- The program design includes a clear training plan including pre-service and in-service training on skills needed for the service, regular corps meetings, citizenship training, diversity training, etc.
- The application gives a description of the member supervision plan.

- The program design includes a strong member development performance measure.

**Organizational Capacity:**

- The application shows the agency's track record on the service issue.
- The applicant should demonstrate organizational capacity for grants administration.
- The application discusses the strengths of the agency and its staff.

**Cost Effectiveness:**

- The application provides a cost analysis that explains why the program is cost effective and compares the cost of the AmeriCorps program with similar services provided by other agencies/businesses.
- The application describes sources of match and provides a good sustainability plan.

**Evaluation:**

- The program design includes plans for scientifically based evaluation supported by the budget.

**Application Quality:**

- The applicant uses clear, jargon-free language and spells out acronyms.
- The applicant explains the program as though they are describing it to someone who knows nothing about the program and doesn't assume knowledge on the part of the reader of any aspect of the program or its design.
- The applicant uses research to support the statement of need and program design and cites references.
- The applicant uses spell-checker and has someone other than the author proofread the application.

**Executive Summary:**

- The Executive Summary sets the stage for the rest of the application and must be a strong summary of the proposed program.
- The Executive Summary should introduce all key aspects of the program, including specific numerical goals for program performance.

**Summary of Accomplishments (*previously funded AmeriCorps programs only*):**

- The Summary of Accomplishments is very important because it is your best opportunity to highlight the previous successes of your AmeriCorps program.
- Quantify previous accomplishments and the outcomes (e.g. tutored 400 children with 60% increasing one letter grade or more).
- Explain the significance of the outcomes to the service recipients and the impact of your program on the community.
- Highlight successful partnerships and mention any awards or accolades your program has received.

**Program Narrative:**

- Use the heading titles and numbers in the application instructions.
- Read each question carefully and answer each question fully – don't leave out or shortchange any question. Address all of the key elements described in the instructions.
- Don't repeat the Executive Summary or the Summary of Accomplishments word for word.
- The "Rationale and Approach" section should be strong, so be sure to go into detail.
- Describe how you have involved or will involve the community in planning and implementing the program.
- Mention any support you have from local elected officials.
- Give a clear description of member daily activities, and go into detail on site supervision, training for site supervisors and your plan for monitoring sites.
- Talk about actual commitments you have from partners, other funders, etc., and don't commit other agencies without talking to them first.
- Use the most up-to-date information in your citations, and if the most recent information is several years old, be sure to note that it is the most recent information available.

**Performance Measures:**

- You must have at least one set of aligned performance measures as specified in the application instructions.
- Clearly label each performance measure as Output, Intermediate-Outcome or End-Outcome.

- The performance measures should clearly relate to the program design described in the narrative.

Be sure to consult the “AmeriCorps Program Applicant Performance Measurement Toolkit” and employ the logic model in developing your performance measures. The Project STAR Toolkit is available at: <http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/star/ac-toolkit>

#### **Commission Pet Peeves:**

- Numbers in the narrative or budget that don’t add up (e.g. “There were 2,000 armed assaults in Alabama last year, 3,000 in Apple County” or “Supplies - \$40/member x 20 members = \$600”).
- Grammatical and spelling errors – Profread, Proofread, Proofread!
- Referring to AmeriCorps members as volunteers – AmeriCorps members are just that, AmeriCorps members. They are not employees, volunteers, workers, AmeriCorps employees, AmeriCorps volunteers or AmeriCorps workers. Spell “member” with a lowercase m unless it is at the beginning of a sentence.
- Referring to member service using employment terminology. Members engage in “service,” not “work.” They “serve,” not “work.” You “enroll and exit” members, not “hire and fire.”
- Misspelling AmeriCorps. Because AmeriCorps is a registered trade name, you must always spell it this way (but you don’t need to include the ® after it). The “A” and the “C” are always capitalized, and there is always an “s” at the end.